Stepping into the future

Newfoundland & Labrador's Early Childhood Development Initiative

Strengthening Children, Families and Communities

Baseline Report

GOVERNMENT OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Foreword...

103-05403/

Gerald Smith, M.H.A.
Minister of Health
and Community Services

It is my pleasure to present the provincial Baseline Report for *Stepping into the Future: Newfoundland and Labrador's Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI).* This first report marks the beginning of an annual public reporting process that, in future, will focus on the progress of the programs under the *ECDI* and the status of early childhood development in this province.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has made great strides in recent years to improve services and programs for children, their families, and communities. Many of these accomplishments are highlighted in this report. A common trend throughout is the increased emphasis on prevention, early intervention, and the significant contribution prenatal and early childhood experiences have on later health and well-being.

The *Early Childhood Development Initiative* is a unique agreement that was reached between provincial and territorial governments and the Government of Canada. It recognizes the importance of the early years and the valuable role families and communities play in supporting children. It provides a tremendous opportunity to further promote the importance of the early years, and in particular, expand on service and program areas that show great promise in fostering young children's growth and development.

This initiative complements our recently released Strategic Health Plan, *Healthier Together.*

With our provincial partners in *Stepping into the Future: Newfoundland and Labrador's Early Childhood Development Initiative*, the Departments of Education and Human Resources and Employment, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals, organizations, and service providers who continue to shape and support the direction of early childhood services in this province.

GERALD SMITH, M.H.A.
District of Port au Port
Minister of Health and Community Services

Introduction...

On September 11, 2000, federal, provincial, and territorial governments in Canada reached an important agreement called the *Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI)*. This initiative is a long-term agreement that will see the federal government provide annual funding to provinces and territories to improve and expand early childhood development programs and services.

On June 18, 2001, the provincial government announced *Stepping into the Future: Newfoundland and Labrador's Early Childhood Development Initiative*. Over a five-year period, government will invest an additional $36.6 million in services and programs for children from prenatal to age six.

As part of the *Early Childhood Development Initiative*, provincial and territorial governments are committed to producing annual public reports on progress made with investments in early childhood development. This report provides an overview of activities and expenditures prior to implementation of the *Early Childhood Development Initiative* in Newfoundland and Labrador. It will serve as a benchmark for future *ECDI* annual reports. It provides an opportunity to highlight recent achievements and progress made in support of children during their early years.

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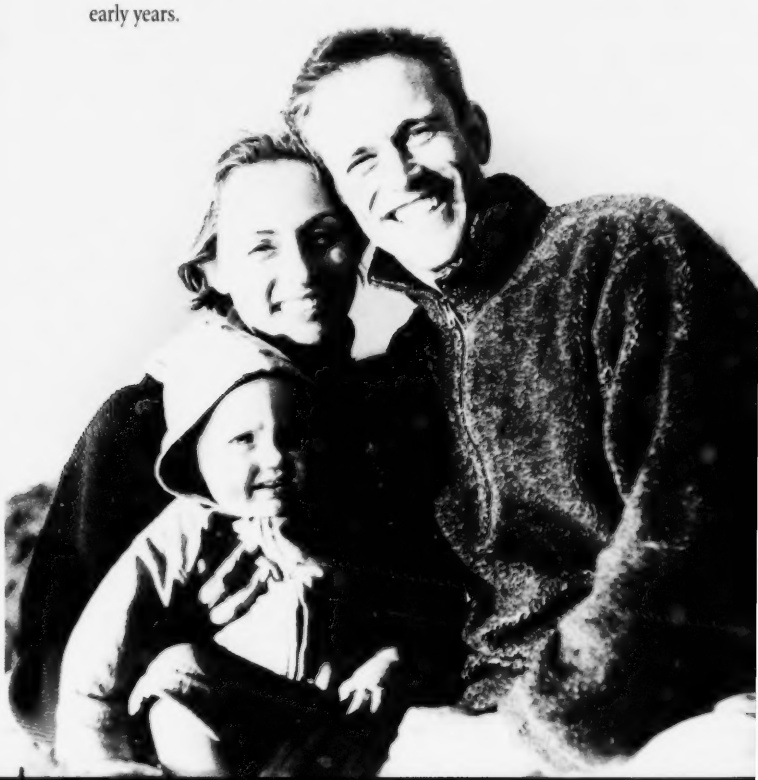


Accomplishments & Strategic Directions...

Early childhood is a very important time in human development. It is the foundation for lifelong competence and coping skills that have a positive impact on health, behaviour, and learning. Research indicates that prior to entering school, children have already undergone significant growth and development.

In recent years, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has increased its focus on the early years and has demonstrated considerable leadership in policy development and strategic initiatives that strengthen the range of services and programs available to young children, families, and communities. Areas where work has taken place to support early childhood development include:

- ***People, Partners, and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*** - a framework for integrating economic and social development to better coordinate services for people. The plan places strong emphasis on prevention, early intervention, and partnerships within government and regions. A significant achievement has been the establishment of six regional steering committees that focus on long-term development issues and the commitment to measure social progress through a social audit. Early childhood development has been identified as a priority area for action by the regional committees;

- ***Listening & Acting: A Plan for Child, Youth, and Community Empowerment*** - a report of the Newfoundland House of Assembly Select Committee on Children's Interests which highlights findings of an extensive provincewide consultation on the issues facing children in all parts of the province. The report provides a strong foundation toward improving children's services;

- ***Model of Coordination for Services to Children and Youth*** - a service coordination framework that provides a template for increased collaboration among government departments and service providers working with children, youth, and families. The Individual Services Support Plan (ISSP), which grew from the Model of Coordination, is a common cross-disciplinary case management process designed to assist children, families, and service providers;

- ***National Child Benefit (NCB)*** - an annual provincial investment of approximately $10 million to support children living in low-income families for services such as child care, drug card benefits, family resource programs, community youth networks, and residential and mental health services for youth;

- ***Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit*** - a tax-free, monthly payment for low-income families, including families receiving social assistance, to assist with the cost of raising children;

- ***Child Care Services Act*** - new legislation that expands the range of child care opportunities for families, and places increased attention on factors known to influence quality care such as training and provider-child ratios in child care settings;

- ***Child, Youth, and Family Services Act*** - new legislation which replaces the former Child Welfare Act and reaches beyond the original parameters to support prevention and earlier intervention for children who face barriers to reaching optimum development;

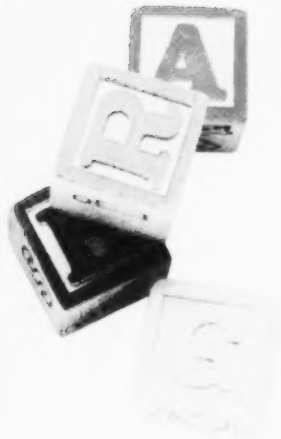
- ***Child and Youth Advocacy Act*** - new legislation which will provide an independent mechanism to ensure the rights and interests of children and youth are advanced;

- ***Words to Live By: A Strategic Literacy Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*** - a comprehensive literacy strategy for all ages including an emphasis on literacy during the early years.

- ***Primary Matters: Report of the Provincial Strategy for Early Literacy Committee*** - a provincial strategy for enhancing the language and literacy development of children ages 3 to 8.

Collectively, these strategic directions and special initiatives have resulted in improved and increased services for young children residing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Services & Programs for Children...



The following section highlights some of the key services and programs available in the province for young children and families. These programs were in place prior to the *Early Childhood Development Initiative*.

Parent and Child Health Programs: Through regional health and community services boards, public health nurses provide a wide range of health promotion and prevention programs focusing on the preconception, prenatal, and early childhood periods. Examples include childbirth education, child health clinics, breastfeeding support, and preschool health checks. One specific initiative is the universal screening program of newborns, Healthy Beginnings. Early assessment helps to identify families who may benefit from long-term follow-up through additional home visits and referrals to other supports services for the family.

Healthy Baby Clubs: Healthy Baby Clubs are programs that provide peer support, education and skills training, breastfeeding support, food supplements, and supportive environments for pregnant women and families with newborns. Professional support is provided by public health nurses and regional nutritionists. Each club is guided by a local advisory committee. Government and key stakeholders have worked together in the development of community-based Healthy Baby Clubs and supported the start-up of several additional programs throughout the province in 2000.

Mother Baby Food Allowance: The Mother Baby Food Allowance is a monthly benefit provided through the Department of Human Resources and Employment to pregnant women and families with children under the age of one who are in receipt of social assistance. The benefit assists families with the additional costs of eating healthy during the prenatal and postnatal periods.

Direct Home Services Program: The Direct Home Services Program is a home-based early intervention program for children, birth to age six, with developmental delay and/or disability. The purpose of the intervention is to support parenting skills and enhance the development of the child.

Immunization: Childhood immunizations (e.g., Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Haemophilus Influenza B, Measles, Mumps, and Rubella) are publicly-funded and provided by public health nurses and family physicians. This series of vaccines is given to children between two months and five years of age and approximately 95 per cent of children in Newfoundland and Labrador are fully immunized.

Children's Dental Program: The Children's Dental Program provides basic dental services for all children of the province up to and including age twelve.

Specialized Services: Throughout the province, access to specialized services for children and their families include psychological services, speech-language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work, mental health, and medical and/or developmental interventions from the hospitals, medical clinics, and community services.

During 2000-2001, a significant achievement was the opening of the new Janeway Child Health Centre of the Health Care Corporation of St. John's. Various divisions of the Child Health Program provide local and provincial programs and services to children with medical, developmental, and neurological needs. One such service is the Provincial Perinatal Program which provides education, clinical guidelines, perinatal health information and research, as well as a follow-up clinic for high risk infants.

Autism Services: In 1999, the province began a pilot project for preschool age children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The project focused on the delivery of Applied Behavioural Analysis treatment to children and specialized training for families. During 2000-2001, plans were underway to expand this initiative to encompass a broader service plan throughout the province for children with Autism and their families.

Adoption/Post Adoption Services: Services to birth parents, prospective adoptive parents and adoptees are offered through the collaborative efforts of regional health and community services boards and government. Services include: approval of prospective adoptive parents, assistance for parents to make a permanent plan of care for their child, and post adoption services for adults.

Protective and Supportive Services: The Department of Health and Community Services, in partnership with regional

health and community services boards, provide an array of supports to children and their families through the Child, Youth, and Family Services Program. The program is designed to promote the safety, health, and well-being of children. It includes in-home supports and, where necessary, alternative care arrangements for children. These services are guided through the new Child, Youth, and Family Services Act.

Financial Support: The Department of Human Resources and Employment delivers a variety of employment and income supports to low-income families. It is responsible for the delivery of the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit and other initiatives such as the Supported Employment for Single Parents Program pilot and the Extended Drug Card Program. Families receiving social assistance may also access benefits for special diets, private daycare, vision care, dental care, and limited medical transportation.

Through regional health and community services boards, support is further provided through the Special Child Welfare Allowance and the Child Welfare Allowance. The first is available to families who require additional assistance to support a child at home with special needs, while the Child Welfare Allowance is provided to relatives or significant others caring for children who are unable to reside with their natural family.

Child Care: Support to families and communities for child care is provided through the collaborative efforts of several provincial departments, regional health and community services boards, and community partners. The Department of Health and Community Services sets provincial standards for child care services and the health and community services boards are responsible for licensing and monitoring services to ensure children receive quality care. Regional boards also deliver a Child Care Subsidy Program for families who require financial assistance for their children to attend a licensed child care service.

Significant advances have occurred in child care services over the past few years as a result of increased funding opportunities and implementation of the new Child Care Services Act.

"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow." -Anon.

Services & Programs for Children...

Literacy: In May 2000, government released Words to Live By: A Strategic Literacy Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador 2000. This plan addresses literacy for all ages, both within and outside the formal education system.

In October 2000, a major family literacy conference, Gathering Voices, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, was held in Newfoundland and Labrador. As part of this project, two documents were published - Little Steps directory of family literacy programs and the Little Steps general information booklet on family literacy. Additionally, 13 non-profit, community-based projects focusing on early childhood and family literacy were funded.

Itinerant Services: The Department of Education provides home-based services to preschool children who are blind/visually impaired and deaf/hard of hearing. Approximately one year before entering the school system, school district educational psychologists provide assessment services and assist with transitional planning to the school system.

Kindergarten and School-based Programs: Newfoundland and Labrador has a mandated, provincewide half day Kindergarten program. This service is available to children who are five years old by December 31st of the current school year. In addition, several schools throughout the province have set aside space for family resource programs and pre-school readiness programs. Infant care centres are operating in two senior high schools in the province where students require on-site child care services and support.

Family Resource Programs: Family Resource Programs are programs which promote the well- being of children and their families by supporting children, parents, and caregivers through a variety of child-focused and parent-focused programs. Emphasis is placed on promoting healthy child development, supporting parents, and building healthy communities.

Early Childhood Development Initiative...

Stepping into the Future: Newfoundland and Labrador's Early Childhood Development Initiative presents a tremendous opportunity for government to build on past successes and further expand services and programs for young children, families, and communities.

The objectives of the initiative are:

- to promote early childhood development so that, to their fullest potential, children will be physically and emotionally healthy, safe and secure, ready to learn, and socially engaged and responsible; and,
- to help children reach their potential and to help families support their children within strong communities.

Across Canada, the *Early Childhood Development Initiative* will focus on four areas of action for children, their families and communities. The action areas are:

- promotion of healthy pregnancy, birth, and infancy;
- improving parenting and family support;
- strengthening early childhood development, learning, and care; and,
- strengthening community supports.

In October 2000, government held a consultation session with approximately 80 stakeholders interested in early childhood issues. The focus of the event was to discuss the *Early Childhood Development Initiative* and identify the priority services and programs for funding. In the spring of 2001, the provincial government announced funding for the services and programs identified below.

Promotion of Healthy Pregnancy, Birth and Infancy

Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement - a monthly financial benefit available to eligible low income pregnant women and families with children under the age of one year. The program recognizes both the importance of good nutrition during early childhood development and linking families to helpful resources such as community health nurses, Healthy Baby Clubs, and family resource programs.

Healthy Baby Clubs - programs that provide peer support, education and skills training relating to healthy pregnancy, birth, and parenting; breastfeeding support; food supplements; and supportive environments for pregnant women and families with newborns. Professional support is provided by public health nurses and regional nutritionists. Each healthy baby club is guided by a local advisory committee. Funds are provided to new and existing programs located within community-based family resource programs.

Strengthening Early Childhood Development, Learning and Care

Early Childhood Literacy Programs - programs which reach children early to support the development of literacy skills. Funding is available in the form of grants to non-profit organizations delivering literacy programs that show merit in promoting early literacy skills.

KinderStart Program - an enhanced transition-to-school orientation program for pre-Kindergarten children and their families. The KinderStart Program is implemented by school districts and provides eight in-school sessions for children and families in preparation for school entry.

Child Care Services - programs and services to strengthen the licensed child care system in Newfoundland and Labrador by increasing the number of subsidized child care spaces, implementing an Education Supplement for Early Childhood Educators, extending annual equipment grants to regulated family child care providers, and enhancing regional resource capacity to deliver licensed child care services.

Early Childhood Development Initiative...

Improving Parenting and Family Support

Early Intervention Services - expansion of services for children with developmental delay and disabilities by increasing the number of home-based early intervention staff and providing support to more families who require direct service intervention. A particular emphasis is on increasing home-based intervention to children with Autism.

Strengthening Community Supports

Family Resource Programs - programs which promote the well-being of children and their families by supporting children, parents, and caregivers through a variety of child-focused and parent-focused programs. Emphasis is placed on promoting healthy child development, supporting parents, and building healthy communities. Funds are provided to new and existing family resource programs in the province to expand the availability of community-based programs for children and their families.

Expenditures...

The 2000-01 expenditures relative to the program and service areas where future investment will occur through the *Early Childhood Development Initiative* are detailed in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Baseline Expenditures 2000-2001

Mother Baby Food Allowance	$780,000
Family Resource Programs & Healthy Baby Clubs	$1,200,000
Early Childhood Literacy Grants	$79,615
Early Intervention Services	$1,638,385
Child Care Services	$7,900,000
TOTAL	$11,598,000

Beginning in fiscal year 2001-02, the annual investments for *Newfoundland and Labrador's Early Childhood Development Initiative* will build on previous provincial expenditures. Over a five-year period, the dedicated funds for *Newfoundland and Labrador's Early Childhood Development Initiative* are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Annual Early Childhood Development Initiative Expenditures 2001-2006

2001-2002	$5.2 million
2002-2003	$6.8 million
2003-2004	$8.3 million
2004-2005	$8.2 million
2005-2006	$8.1 million
TOTAL	$36.6 million

Contacts...

For further information on the ***Early Childhood Development Initiative*** programs and services, please use the appropriate program contact information listed below.

Stepping into the Future: Early Childhood Development Initiative Department of Health and Community Services
709-729-2959

Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement
Department of Human Resources and Employment
1-800-508-4788

Early Childhood Literacy Programs
Department of Education
709-729-6185

Grant Information
www.gov.nf.ca/edu/literacy/slp.htm

KinderStart Program
Department of Education
709-729-6185

Family Resource Programs
Department of Health and Community Services
709-729-5554

Child Care Services
Department of Health and Community Services
709-729-2668

Early Intervention Services
Department of Health and Community Services
709-729-3550

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